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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the attitudes of 81 teachers and 43 site administrators about the classroom instructor's public relations role. This research was completed in two school districts in Texas during the spring semester of 2000 using an instrument developed for the study. Findings show that: (1) classroom instructors and site administrators perceive the teacher's public relations role as critical to school success; (2) a majority of classroom instructors did not receive either preservice or inservice public relations training; and (3) site administrators felt more strongly than teachers that teachers should receive public relations training. (Contains 4 tables and 32 references.) (Author/SLD)

Texas School Communications Study: Training for Frontline School Practitioners is Indicated

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the attitudes of 81 teachers and 43 site administrators about the classroom instructor's public relations role. This research was completed in two school districts in Texas during the spring semester of 2000 using an instrument developed by the author. Findings showed that (a) classroom instructors and site administrators perceive the teacher's public relations role as critical to school success, (b) a majority of classroom instructors did not receive either preservice or inservice public relations training, and (c) site administrators felt more strongly than teachers that teachers should receive public relations training.

Improving home-school relations has never been easy, but if recent communications research is any indicator, then school districts and universities have much to refine. Pope (1987) studied superintendents and school district communications director's attitudes and found that teachers' public relations (PR) role was extremely important to the success of the school. However, Wiget (1995) found that school executives rated training for public relations as a low priority. Becker (1999) studied the increasing use of technology by educators across the U.S. and found training deficient. He did find an extensive increase in the use of technology by teachers and other school personnel to reach the publics they serve and to improve instruction, but with little subsequent preparation. An Education Commission of the States document (ECS, 1998) states that only 15 percent of K-12 teachers in the nation have received approximately 9 hours of training in technology. A Texas study demonstrated similar results (Denton, Davis, & Strader, 2001). With the ever broadening contact through the use of current technology and a demanding school-community, it is essential to incorporate public relations training into preservice and inservice teacher preparation programs. Furthermore, this training should be grounded in the current tools

of technology.

METHOD

Sample

The sample for this study was drawn from two east Texas school districts, Bryan Independent School District (BISD) and College Station Independent School District (CSISD), representing approximately 20,000 students and over 2000 teachers and administrators. Eighty-one teachers were chosen from a random sample taken from the two districts teaching pool. Forty-three administrators agreed to participate out of 63 solicited. The appropriate sample size was determined through the use of NQuery (1999), a statistical software package. After three rounds of distribution, a 60% and 68% return rate was attained for teachers and site administrators, respectively (see Tables 1 & 2).

Instrument

The author, using the Delphi Technique, developed the Attitude of Teachers Public Relations Role (ATPRR) Instrument I for teachers, and ATPRR Instrument II for administrators. The questions for the survey were designed to maximize teacher and administrator responses to individual items while minimizing disruption to their daily work flow. The instruments underwent several revisions and was pilot tested at the Principals' Institute at Texas A&M University with 20 currently practicing and preservice administrators. ATPRR I included 33 items while ATPRR II had 30. Section I numbers 1-15 contained demographic and related background information while section II 16-33 (ATPRR I) and 16-30 (ATPRR II) comprised primarily nominal and scaled response items with open comment areas included. In the teachers' survey, eight modified visual analogue scales were used to measure perceptions to questionnaire statements with items 31 and 32 used to rate teachers attitudes about administrative and district level performance with regard to providing training (see Tables 3 and 4). The administrators' survey utilized six modified visual analogue scales to measure participant perceptions to survey statements relating to the teacher's school communications role (see Tables 3 and 4). The six-item subscale for the study [$\alpha = .8731$, ($n=124$)] measured teachers' ($\alpha = .6975$, $n=81$) and administrators' ($\alpha = .7019$, $n=43$) attitude towards teachers' public relations role was deemed reliable.

Table 1. Summary of Ethnicity and Gender of Faculty for Bryan ISD and College Station ISD as Reported by the Sample

	Black N %	Hispanic N %	White N %	Asian/Other N %	Gender N %
BISD (n=45)	0	2 (4.4%)	41 (91.1%)	1 (2.2%) 1 (2.2%) (DNR)	6 (13.3%) M 37 (82.2%) F 2 (4.4%) (DNR)
CSIS D (n=36)	1 (2.8%)	0	31 (86.1%)	1 (2.8%) 3 (8.3%) (DNR)	4 (11.1%)M 27 (75%)F 5 (13.9%) (DNR)

Note. DNR = did not respond.

Table 2. Summary of Ethnicity and Gender of Administrators for Bryan ISD and College Station ISD as Reported by the Sample

	Black N %	Hispanic N %	White N %	Asian/Other N %	Gender N %
BISD (n=25)	3 (12%)	2 (8%)	20 (80%)	0%	8 (32%)M 16 (64%)F 1 (4.0%) (DNR)
CSIS D (n=18)	2 (11.1%)	0%	15 (83.3%)	0% 1 (5.6%) (DNR)	4 (22.2%)M 12 (66.7%)F 2 (11.1%) (DNR)

Note. DNR = did not respond.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the respondents to the ATPRR I and II were analyzed to generate an overall picture of responses to the survey. Interpretation and analysis of the data followed the principles provided by Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996). Teacher responses and administrator responses were disaggregated for individual and group analysis. Missing data was assigned a code depending on the individual item response. The visual analogue scale was coded and entered according to the value assigned to the question by the participant. The data from the surveys were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (1999) to yield descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percents, cumulative frequencies, cumulative percents, means, and standard deviations. An Analysis of Variance was calculated comparing means within and between samples at the .05 and .01 level of significance for the continuous scales of both instruments.

FINDINGS

The two school districts selected for this study serve the same community, but with vastly different populations. Because of these differences, the responses to the 33 item scale were consistently similar with a few noted exceptions. The only minor differences between the two districts were among professional roles, teachers and administrators (see Table 3).

This study demonstrated that frontline educators had a high level of interaction with the public. Fifty-six percent of teachers and 76% of administrators reported interacting face-to-face and electronically with external publics between 1-6+ times each day. Even with this high level of interaction slightly less than 50% of administrators reported receiving PR training in their graduate programs with no teachers receiving this preparation at the undergraduate or graduate level.

When technology was used for communications purposes approximately 84% of site administrators and teachers reported using varying internet modes to communicate directly with their publics. Most teachers and site administrators noted that they had not received adequate preparation for this added job function. However, there did seem to be some discrepancy among teacher and administrator respondents as to how much use was attained. Between 70-80% of all the study's participants reported using desktop publishing programs to communicate with internal and external clients, but a majority had claimed little formal training for this added duty.

Over 65% of educators reported maintaining class web-pages, list-servs and other internet based communication methods to reach internal/external clients. Few within this group reported receiving formal training to fulfill this role. Half of the administrators reported that, in most cases, they did not receive any formal preservice training for this vital work, and 25% of the teacher participants concurred. Of those participants reporting if any formal inservice training

was provided for these duties, 63% of educators said no formal inservice training was afforded them.

Most teachers (82%) and administrators (100%) were aware that their district had a public relations specialist, but most reported that this individual did not provide or arrange for PR inservice training. Many of the teachers (72%) were unable to respond to this item.

Teachers who reported having received formal PR preparation from their district were asked to rate the training they had received and their administrations efforts to bring this instruction to them. Ninety-five percent reported mangement's efforts as average to below average with similar figures when teachers were asked how the district's efforts faired (see Table 4).

When teachers were asked if inservice or preservice training would have helped them in their current practice, over 60% reported in the affirmative indicating a need for this instruction not only at the district level, but in college courses prior to service. Further, instructors deemed it essential to receive this training grounded in the "tools of technology" that they will be required to use in praxis.

The mean scores were established on a scale of 1 to 7 with a 7 score being the highest perceived importance and 1 being not important at all. The teacher's mean response for the subscale was 5.02 while the administrators was 5.95. Interestingly both teachers and administrators high and low scores were recorded on items 18a and 20a of the instrument. For more comparisons of subscale responses for teachers and administrators see Table 3. Table 4 displays the findings for teacher participants pertaining to the quality of current public relations performance and training.

Table 3. Summary of Bryan ISD and College Station ISD Teacher and Administrator Responses to the Six-item ATPRR Survey Subscale Pertaining to the Teacher's Public Relations Role

Survey Question	BISD/C SISD Teacher s N Mean	BISD/ CSISD Admini strator s N Mean	F- Ra tio	P- Val ue

18a. If you have received preservice PR training then please rate the importance of this training. (n=45)	21 4.19	24 5.38	8.6 6	.005 **
19a. If you have received inservice PR training then please rate the importance of this training. (n=44)	29 4.86	15 5.87	10.791	.01 1*
20a. The teacher's role in your schools PR efforts:(n= 123)	80 5.67	43 6.49	15.257	.00 0**
20b. Teachers receiving preservice PR training to the eventual fulfillment of their instructional role:(n=124)	81 5.02	43 6.00	14.717	.00 0**
20c. Teachers receiving inservice PR training to the eventual fulfillment of their instructional role:(n=124)	81 5.11	43 6.07	12.978	.00 0**
28. How important PR training would be for the teaching staff involved in the public information mediums previously mentioned:(n=123)	80 5.27	43 5.86	5.463	.02 1*
*Significant at the .05 level. **Significant at the .01 level				

Table 4. Summary of Bryan ISD and College Station ISD Teacher Responses to the ATPRR Survey Items 31-34 Pertaining to the Quality of Current Public Relations Performance and Training

Survey Question	BISD Teachers (n=45)	CSISD Teachers (n=36)
31. Rate your administrators	Below Avg 23(51.1%)	Below Avg 15 (41.7%)

efforts to bring PR training to your campus. (n=77)	Average (+) 20(44.4%) Missing 2 (4.4%)	Average(+) 19 (52.7%) Missing 2 (5.5)
32. Rate your districts efforts to bring PR training to your campus. (n=79)	Below Avg 27 (60%) Average (+) 17 (37.7%) Missing 1(2.2%)	Below avg 16 (44.5%) Average (+) 19(52.8%) Missing 1(2.77%)
33. Do you think that PR training in your preservice university program would have helped you better deal with parents and your local community in your first years as a teacher? (n=75)	Yes 30(66.6%) No 7(15.6%) Did not know 4(8.9%) Missing 4(8.9%)	Yes 24 (66.7%) No 4 (11.1%) Did not know 6 (16.6%) Missing 2 (5.6%)
34. Do you think that inservice PR training would aid you now in your current teacher practice? (n=75)	Yes 28 (62.2%) No 11(24.4%) Did not know 2 (4.4%) Missing 4(8.9 %)	Yes 25(69.4%) No 5(13.9%) Did not know 4 (11.1%) Missing 2 (5.6%)

Survey items 31-34 were included in ATPRR I (teachers survey) only.

DISCUSSION

According to this research, increased public contact makes it necessary for educators to gain much needed public relations training. Much of this is due to the increased communication opportunities afforded through the application of contemporary technologies. Although many of the teachers and administrators receive little if any PR preparation, most practitioners believe that this training, grounded in the current evolving technologies, is essential to school success. Many of these modern communications tools are making it impossible to remain isolated in the classroom and should be used effectively to reach the many publics we serve (Anglin, 1995;

Guillory, 2000; Leu & Leu, 2000; Pierson, 2001; Roblyer & Edwards, 2001). Experts (Becker, 1999; Doyle, 1999; Meek, 1999; Marx, 1998 & Strasser, 2001) in school technology and communications encourage this preparation of educators to master and more fully utilize these powerful mediums for constructive use and to enhance school communication as well as the public's perception of schools.

Teachers and administrators of BISD and CSISD recognize the importance of preservice and inservice training for teachers in the public relations role, as evidenced in this study. However, most of the teachers and almost half of the administrators who responded to the survey had not received this training. Several authors (Bernays, 1979; Hogan, 1999; Meek, 1999; West, 1985; 1997; and Wiget, 1995) stressed the importance of this instruction and its significance for organizational improvement and to help encourage community support.

While administrators in BISD and CSISD recognized the importance of PR preparation, teachers from both districts rated the quality and quantity of teamwork and training for their PR function as poor. Without proper training, teamwork is hampered. Otto and Greisdorf (1999) support the use of effective teaming strategies to improve school community relations.

A majority of teachers and almost half of the administrators from BISD and CSISD received little or no training. They recognized that they frequently interact with the public and perform many public relations duties without the necessary background to effectively carry out this task. Almost all teachers and administrators recognized the importance of receiving high quality public relations training to fulfill this important professional function. School communications experts (Bagin, 1988; Holcomb, 1993; Kochamba and Murray, 2000; Christian, 1997) have long recognized that one of the most important roles educators play is the one in which they receive the least preparation. In the age of national accountability, testing, increased use of technology to communicate, and the increasing professionalization of teaching, is it acceptable for colleges and school districts not to provide this training?

CONCLUSION

According to the literature, schools are moving from the traditional top-down management conventions to more democratic practices. This phenomenon occurs in current classroom application as well as in school leadership efforts (Feinberg, 1998; Lashway, 1998; Thornburg, 1998). Technology helps to drive much of this change. School communications is certainly no exception. The public relations function of teachers has been over-looked for some time. Preparation for this role has been neglected. If current school reform efforts are to succeed, teachers and site administrators must have the tools and training for this developing paradigm.

Currently, for teachers, this preparation is not apart of their pre-professional training, and as for the site administrators, only about half in this study reported receiving this type of instruction in graduate school.

Future research into parents' views and other school stake-holders must be conducted to ascertain the attitudes they hold with regard to the teacher's public relations role. Preservice and inservice PR training programs need to be established for teachers and reestablished for frontline administrators in order for them to better carry out their roles in improving school community relations and this training must be grounded in the current tools of technology.

*Full tabular results of ATPRR I&II are available at <http://atpr.fws1.com/tables>

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